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SPECIAL POLITICAL AND DECOLONIZATION COMMITTEE (FOURTH COMMITTEE)
4th meeting held on
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at 10 a.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 4th MEETING

Chairman:	Mr. HUDYMA	(Ukraine)
later:	Mr. SAMANA (Vice-Chairman)	(Papua New Guinea)
later:	Mr. HUDYMA (Chairman)	(Ukraine)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

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REQUESTS FOR HEARINGS (A/C.4/49/4/Add.7-8, A/C.4/49/6 and Add.1-2, 6, 8, 9)

1. The CHAIRMAN informed the members of the Committee that he had received notification of two requests for hearing under agenda item 18, concerning Guam (A/C.4/49/4/Add.7 and 8) and Western Sahara (A/C.4/49/6 and Add.1-2, 6, 8, and 9). He took it that the members of the Committee had decided to grant those requests.

2. It was so decided.

AGENDA ITEM 18: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE GRANTING OF INDEPENDENCE TO COLONIAL COUNTRIES AND PEOPLES (Territories not covered under other agenda items) (continued) (A/49/23 (Part II, Part V, chap. VIII, Part VI, chap. IX, and Part VII, chap. X), A/AC.109/1179-1183, 1185-1186, 1188-1190, 1192-1195, 1197, A/49/287, 381 and 492)

Hearing of representatives of Non-Self-Governing Territories and petitioners

Question of New Caledonia (A/C.4/49/5 and Add.1)

3. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Uregei (Congrès Populaire of New Caledonia) took a place at the table.

4. Mr. UREGEI (Congrès Populaire of New Caledonia) said that he wished to inform Committee members of the contents of the unilateral proclamation of the sovereignty of the Kanak people over their own country adopted as a resolution during the second Congrès Général Populaire, held at Naratch Arama on 24 September 1994.

5. The Kanak people had been in a relationship of colonial dependence on France since 24 September 1853. Having seized the Kanaks' country, France had deprived them of all their rights, unilaterally established colonial organs of power and pursued a policy of lawlessness and violence towards the Kanak people. The Kanaks had endured the burden of capitalist colonial oppression in the political sphere as victims of economic exploitation by French expatriates and had also suffered from mercantile capitalism operating on a transnational basis. The Kanak population had consequently been forced out, its traditional culture destroyed and its age-old traditions abolished.

6. Right from the start of its colonial dependence, the Kanak people had waged a struggle against its oppressors in order to regain its dignity, freedom and independence, and that struggle had culminated in an official demand for recognition of Kanak independence formulated on 22 June 1975. The Kanak people demanded to be recognized as a single people and the sole legitimate masters of the Kanaks' country. The Kanak people had the right to free self-determination, protection of its dignity and liberty, and the return of all the lands forming part of the Kanaks' country. In other words, the issue was the re-establishment of Kanak independence based on socialist principles and traditional structures. The Kanaks also had the right to receive the necessary material resources guaranteeing their economic, social and cultural development and the building of Kanak socialism. The Kanaks had demanded respect for themselves and the rapid and effective fulfilment of the commitments given by French President Mitterrand, as well as the commitments made in statements by the French Government, which had recognized the Kanaks' right to independence.

7. The Kanaks had become foreigners in their own country. After 141 years of colonial oppression they had become a national minority with no control over their own land. Kanaks were not French citizens. And since every people had a right to citizenship, the Kanaks currently wanted to become citizens of their

own country. The Kanaks' right to independence had been recognized by the Socialist and Communist Parties in November 1979; by the declaration signed at Nainville-les Roches in July 1983; by the South Pacific Forum; by the participants at the Non-Aligned Summit Conference; and by the United Nations and many specialized agencies.

8. On that basis, the participants at the second Congrès Général Populaire had adopted a resolution, the operative part of which unilaterally proclaimed the sovereignty of the Kanak people in order to protect the Kanaks' sacred right to be considered the sole legitimate masters of the Kanaks' country, secure unconditional self-determination and freedom, and independently determine their political status: Kanak independence based on socialist principles and traditional structures.

9. The resolution went on to condemn the unilateral seizure of the country by France on 24 September 1853, the colonial oppression of the Kanaks for 141 years, the signing of the Matignon Accords which aimed at destroying the Kanaks' culture and customs, and the holding of a referendum for self-determination in 1988 which took no account of the Kanak people's right freely to determine its own future. It proclaimed Kanak sovereignty over the land, natural resources, 200-mile territorial sea area, and airspace. It stated that a people's democracy would be built in the political, social, economic and cultural spheres that took account of traditional structures and aimed at a subsequent transition to socialism. It requested France and all independent and sovereign States and the entire international community to recognize the sovereignty of the Kanak people as proclaimed at Naratch Arama on 24 September 1994.

10. The Congrès Populaire had declared 24 September the national day of Kanak sovereignty and independence. It had adopted a number of provisions on the organization of the independent State, including the need to request the President of France to recognize Kanak sovereignty and return all their property to the traditional leaders and owners. Henceforth the country of the Kanaks would be called "Omoa Mo Aye", which meant "sources, peace and tranquillity". The colours of the flag of the Congrès Populaire would remain unchanged, and its crest would depict a hut, a silver fir tree and a coconut palm with the following inscription: "Custom is my constitution. It is my life and the life of my society". The third general people's congress would take place on 24 September 1996. A letter had been sent to François Mitterrand, President of the French Republic, and the Government of France, but no reply had yet been received.

11. Mr. Uregei withdrew.

Question of Guam

12. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mrs. Marianne Rios (Guahan Landowners United) took a place at the petitioners' table.

13. Mrs. Marianne RIOS (Guahan Landowners United) said that the most complicated and pressing issue in Guam was the land problem. The indigenous Chamorros were waiting for the Government of the United States to return their ancestral lands, which had been unjustly taken away from them, which they could not hand down to their children, and which were to a large extent simply lying idle.

14. She drew the Committee's attention to the document prepared by her organization which had been submitted to the Special Committee on 11 July 1994 and to the Fourth Committee at the present session. The document showed clearly that, given the political will, it would be possible to resolve the land issue in the best possible way by returning land to the representatives of the Chamorro people without prejudice to the military bases of the Government of the United States. The Chamorros understood that the full return of all the land would not be possible in many cases. However, any excess land must be immediately transferred, not through the local authorities but directly to the owners from whom it had been taken.

15. The representatives of the indigenous people asserting their right to their land were now ready to take decisive action. Their testimony at the Land Conference left no doubt of that fact. One example of their position was provided by the statement of Deborah A. Camacho, in which she said that the issue was not whether the Chamorro people were patriotic or nationalistic or were seeking to undermine the national security interests of the United States. In fact the Chamorros were probably patriots in the highest meaning of the word. The people of Guam were the strongest supporters of keeping the peace in the Pacific region. But the point was that, if the United States military was not using local land for national security interests and if such land was deemed excess, it must be returned to its owners.

16. In the words of one Guamian, the current situation on the island was such that any Chamorro representative who spoke out against injustice and the abuse of power, or offered any other criticism of the actions of the military, was labelled an anti-American troublemaker. The fact that he was an American citizen exercising his constitutional rights meant very little to representatives of the Federal or local Government. The civil rights of the Chamorros must be protected. When the Government violated the rights of its citizens, it was their right and duty to protest against such acts. The way in which the land problems had been settled in Guam in recent years was a shameful and wilful violation of the inalienable rights of all Chamorro landowners.

17. Other representatives of the Chamorro people had referred in their testimony to the inadmissibility of a situation in which Chamorro landowners had no free access to their own land. They paid the same taxes as other American residents and were entitled to freedom of movement and use of the corresponding infrastructure. The Chamorros did not want their children and grandchildren to feel themselves to be second-class citizens who were denied some of their constitutional rights.

18. The Chamorros were victims of arbitrary treatment and could not wait passively for the Federal Government to make up its mind. If the Federal Government did not take the question of the immediate return of excess land to its lawful owners sufficiently seriously, the Chamorros were ready to take immediate action. They would speak out loudly, logically and factually in order to wake up a sleeping America. The United Nations was requested to help in the solution of what was a painful problem and send to the island a fact-finding mission which would be able to make the world community aware of the true situation.

19. Mrs. Marianne Rios withdrew.

20. Mr. Samana (Papua New Guinea), Vice-Chairman, took the chair.

21. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Artero (Artero Realty) took a seat at the petitioners' table.

22. Mr. ARTERO (Artero Realty) said that one of the unique features of Guam was that the people of Guam had never been consulted about any decision. One example was provided by the Artero family itself, whose property had been confiscated by the military without payment of proper compensation. Despite the fact that free enterprise was the foundation of the United States Constitution, the United States Government prevented the Artero family and many other Guamians, who were all United States citizens, from receiving the economic benefits from their land. The seizure of land on Guam after the Second World War had been an act of economic injustice towards the people of Guam. For 50 years now they had been trying unsuccessfully to correct that injustice. Until their land was returned, the people of Guam would be unable to exercise their right to self-determination.

23. The people of Guam had grown tired of political rhetoric and empty promises. An adequate solution must be found for the problem. Recently, a number of Guamians had been arrested for protesting against the violations of their rights. It was to be hoped that Guam would not become the next "hot spot" requiring intervention by United Nations peace-keeping forces.

24. The protest of the people of Guam was prompted by many factors. They included the quality of life on Guam, the disorderly land developments, the lack of any zoning plan, the dangerous aviation-fuel pipes which lay directly on the surface of the ground, and the fact that large areas of confiscated land had been lying idle for more than 50 years. The land also required clearing of the debris and toxic wastes resulting from military activities. Delivering freedom to the Chamorros by restoring their rights to private property would enable them to determine their own destiny. It was precisely that possibility which constituted democracy.

Question of Western Sahara

25. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. O'Rourke took a place at the petitioners' table.

26. Mr. O'ROURKE said that from March to June 1994 he had lived in refugee camps of the Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguia el-Hamra y de Río de Oro (Frente POLISARIO) near Tindouf, Algeria, where he had taught English and studied the military and political realities of the conflict between the Frente POLISARIO and the Kingdom of Morocco. It was his belief that the work of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) would be successful if the United Nations acted in an unbiased manner. Successful results could be achieved if the original United Nations peace plan, to which both parties had agreed, was used as the basis for the identification and registration of persons eligible to vote in the referendum. By adhering to those guidelines, the United Nations would ensure that the referendum was conducted in such a way that neither party could contest its results, and would make significant progress towards stabilizing the situation in North Africa. MINURSO could serve as a model for future United Nations operations which attempted to stabilize volatile regions and ensure international peace and security.

27. The claim that the Frente POLISARIO leadership was forcing Saharans to remain in the refugee camps against their will and refusing to allow them to move to Moroccan-controlled portions of Western Sahara, or to Morocco itself, was untrue. Many Saharans had expressed a desire to return to Western Sahara, but only after a free and fair referendum was held. Refugees who had not seen their families for over 17 years had said that they would prefer to bring their family members to refugee camps rather than to move to Morocco. It was important to note that approximately 200 Moroccan citizens were living in the refugee camps as free men; they were former prisoners of war who had been released by the Frente POLISARIO in 1989. However, the Moroccan Government would not allow them to return to Morocco.

28. It appeared that the Saharan people, under the guidance of the Frente POLISARIO, had created a free and stable society in the refugee camps; officials were democratically elected; health care, education and religious freedom were all basic rights; and women played an increasingly important role in shaping the culture.

29. The goal of the MINURSO operation must be to find a lasting solution to the problem of Western Sahara; the only solution to the conflict was self-determination for the Saharan people. The future of the people, and peace and stability in the region, depended on the United Nations; the Committee had a leadership role in that respect.

30. Mr. SNOUSSI (Morocco) said that some of the information provided by Mr. O'Rourke was inaccurate. It appeared that Mr. O'Rourke had believed everything he had been told when he was in the Territory. It was widely known, and was confirmed in the MINURSO report and by the Under-Secretary-General, that many people had returned of their own free will, after escaping to the Territory from refugee camps in Tindouf.

31. Mr. O'ROURKE said that during his stay in the refugee camps, he had been able to meet a large number of Saharans living there, and none of them had

expressed the wish to return to Moroccan-controlled regions of Western Sahara or to Morocco itself. Unfortunately, he did not have exact statistics, since he had not made any count. The purpose of his statement in the Committee had merely been to pass on the information in his possession.

32. Mr. SNOUSSI (Morocco) said that he did not intend to enter into polemics but merely wished to remind the members of the Committee that, as was well known, refugees wishing to leave the camps did not need to seek permission from those who were detaining them and restricting that freedom.

33. Mr. O'Rourke withdrew.

34. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Boukhari Ahmed (Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saquia el-Hamra y de Río de Oro) took a place at the petitioners' table.

35. Mr. BOUKHARI AHMED (Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguia el-Hamra y de Río de Oro) (Frente POLISARIO) said that it was not possible to say that the United Nations had achieved complete success in the area of decolonization over the 50 years of its existence when the people of Western Sahara living under foreign occupation continued to be deprived of their right to self-determination.

36. After 15 years of fighting there was a favourable international context for the peaceful settlement of conflicts; the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) had worked out a settlement plan for Western Sahara which had gained the acceptance of both parties and had been approved by the Security Council. The objective of the plan was the organization of a referendum of self-determination which would allow the Saharan people to freely choose between independence, for which they had fought, or integration to the Power which had occupied their Territory by force. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 40/50 and OAU resolution 104, the referendum was to be organized in the absence of military or administrative constraints. However, Morocco had imposed on the United Nations the stationing of 65,000 soldiers and of administrative and police forces during the transitional period and tens of thousands of settlers had been transferred to the Territory. Those were certainly not ideal conditions for a free referendum, especially since the number of people eligible to vote did not exceed 80,000. The Saharan Arab Democratic Republic, a full-fledged member of OAU, had made those concessions in order to contribute to the success of the joint effort undertaken by the United Nations and OAU. The Moroccan Government, however, while attempting to use the United Nations to legitimize its occupation of the Territory, had imposed a unilateral modification of the most fundamental provision relating to the question of voter identification in order to include Moroccan people in the voter's list for the referendum.

37. The protracted dispute about the criteria for voter identification could have been avoided if the United Nations had exercised due care to protect the integrity of the peace plan and if the official mediator had taken an independent and impartial position. Unfortunately, that had not been the case.

The Government of the occupying Power, encouraged by the direction of events, had committed itself to forcing a unilateral referendum or provoking the withdrawal of the United Nations and blaming the other party for the failure of the settlement process. After the adoption by the Security Council of resolution 907 (1994), in which it had opted for the second of the three options proposed by the Secretary-General, the Frente POLISARIO had spared no effort to ensure that the peace process, which had been greatly damaged by the deliberate obstruction of the Moroccan Government, was kept alive and ended with success. However, Morocco had yet again created obstacles to the work of identifying Saharans eligible to vote in the referendum and that had compelled the Identification Commission to delay the beginning of its work by several months.

38. There were sufficient facts to demonstrate that much still remained to be done in order to ensure a transparent, fair and free referendum. The transitional period had not yet begun and there were still many unsolved problems. Even if a fair referendum were held, there was no guarantee that Morocco would respect its results, since the Moroccan leaders, both of the Government and of the so-called official opposition, were constantly reiterating that they would not accept anything but a referendum confirming the occupation.

39. The United Nations should assume fully the responsibility incumbent upon it in conformity with the Charter in dealing with that conflict, the continuation of which was depriving the Saharan people of their legitimate rights and endangering the security and stability of the Maghreb and North Africa. The Frente POLISARIO was willing to engage in an official, responsible and serious dialogue with the Moroccan Government to eliminate difficulties on the road to the organization of a referendum of self-determination. A fraudulent referendum, as intended by Morocco, would put the credibility of the United Nations at great risk and could provoke a new outbreak of fighting. Only a referendum of self-determination with international guarantees to ensure its credibility and transparency would lead to a just and definitive peace, and consequently, to the strengthening of stability in the region.

40. Mr. Boukhari Ahmed withdrew.

41. Mr. Hudyma (Ukraine) resumed the Chair.

42. At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. May (Publisher of "Paradigm 2000") took a place at the petitioners' table.

43. Ms. MAY (Publisher, "Paradigm 2000") said that despite the adoption by the General Assembly in 1966 of a resolution calling upon Spain to sponsor a referendum for independence, for 20 years relations between Morocco and Western Sahara, had been in an impasse; a way out could be found if there was an assurance that the referendum in February 1995 would be administered fairly and that all disputes concerning the Spanish census of 1974 could be resolved. That census, taken by Spain, which had centuries of experience in drawing up census reports in dozens of colonies around the world, not to mention in Spain itself, lay at the heart of the controversy.

44. If it was assumed that the figure of 74,000 arrived at in the census was accurate and that all citizens, either male or female, who were 18 years or older had the right to vote, then in order to determine the size of the voting population, theoretically it would be necessary to take into account only the children born to Saharan citizens in 1975, 1976 and the first two months of 1977. On the basis of average statistical data and excluding indicators for infant mortality and for deaths attributable to old age, war or disease, there would be only 33,300 new voters, which was far fewer than the 170,000 voters which the Moroccan Government was insisting should be added to the original 74,000.

45. Another contention used by the Moroccans to convince the countries of the West that their "annexation" was justified was that Morocco had occupied the land before Spain, even though the International Court of Justice had disproved that contention. It was difficult for anyone to imagine his own country being occupied for 20 years by another country claiming it as its own, and his struggle to regain sovereignty being ridiculed as a terrorist guerrilla movement. Yet in manuals, almanacs and reference books, the Frente POLISARIO was referred to as a guerrilla movement. In reality, the "guerrillas" were mostly children, women, shepherds, gardeners and Bedouins.

46. That inconsistency and confusion must be resolved, and the solution was a fair, monitored and open referendum which the world press should be invited to cover. It was distressing that measures were being taken to ban all media observers from the referendum to be held in February. Those actions could send the wrong message to countries that wished to hide behind the pretence of fair elections and manipulate the outcome to suit their goals. Since the United Nations had always acted responsibly in its oversight and monitoring of controversial elections, it was imperative that it should ensure that foreign journalists were allowed into the Territory so as to guarantee the credibility of the results of the referendum. Support to the Saharans in holding a fair, internationally observed referendum should in no way be considered a vote against Morocco. There were many examples in history of allied nations disagreeing on specific international and even domestic policies but recognizing that there was a greater necessity for mutual support than for mutual destruction.

47. South Africa, which until recently had experienced the condemnation and economic sanctions of several countries for its domestic policy, was now experiencing the positive consequences of its recent elections. That was the same nation that had given the world such leaders as Jan Christian Smuts, who had penned the original draft of the Preamble to the United Nations Charter. By modern standards, Thomas Jefferson would be considered a guerrilla, a rebel or a terrorist, not an individual determined to secure the inalienable right of self-determination and freedom from tyranny. No one would have given odds to David against Goliath, to the United States against England. The American colonists had won through sheer will, determination and the hunger for freedom and justice. The Saharans were now struggling against the Goliath Morocco. They simply wanted to live in peace, to have fair and open elections and to be able

to leave the refugee camps they had called home and be reunited with their families they had not been allowed to see for 20 years.

48. International relations were as dynamic and viable as relations between individuals and there were certain basic principles that everyone could believe in and embrace as civilized individuals. There were larger nations that wielded great power, influence and control and smaller, more helpless nations that relied on those basic qualities of justice, liberty, self-determination and truth. However, when conflicts involved forces and nations that were ill-matched and unprepared to defend their own land, freedoms and the right to live in peace, a sense of accountability was required. If it was not possible to make what was just, strong, then what was strong must be made just. The United Nations must pursue the goal laid down in the Preamble to the United Nations Charter of uniting its strength to maintain international peace and security and combining its efforts to accomplish those aims.

49. Ms. May withdrew.

50. At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Paola took a place at the table.

51. Ms. PAOLA, referring to the forthcoming referendum in Western Sahara, said that as a Professional staff member on the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the United States Congress, she had been asked to draft a basic sense of Congress resolution supporting the implementation of the United Nations peace plan for Western Sahara following extensive consultations and after doing the necessary research she had constructed a draft resolution calling upon the United States Congress to support a free and fair referendum and to support the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) and the cease-fire between Morocco and the Frente POLISARIO. However, when the sense of Congress resolution was introduced in the House of Representatives and in the Senate, Morocco had exerted enormous pressure to prevent its adoption, even though it was intended to support the peace process. Despite the campaign of intimidation, the resolution had won the unanimous support of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and passed the House of Representatives in November 1991. Thus the members of Congress had recognized the right of the Saharan people to a free and fair referendum.

52. In Western Sahara, the United Nations was acting as the peacemaker and peace-keeper. Its actions were intended to strengthen the role of the international community and provide hope for countries seeking to resolve conflicts in a peaceful manner. It was extremely important that the United Nations efforts in Western Sahara should be successful. The United Nations had already made a big investment in terms of personnel and finances to the peace process in Western Sahara. To ensure the investment yielded a favourable return, several steps needed to be taken. First, since the 1974 Spanish census was no longer the sole basis for the voters' roll, strict standards had to be adhered to by the United Nations Identification Committee to determine the bona fides of any individual seeking to vote in the referendum. Second, no individual, regardless of his or her position within or outside the United Nations should be permitted to impede the process or influence the outcome of

the referendum. Third, in the event of either party breaching the terms of the United Nations agreement vis-à-vis the referendum or conditions subsequent to the referendum, the Security Council should take swift and appropriate action against the violating party. By insisting that established guidelines should be adhered to, the United Nations would further encourage the holding of a free and fair referendum.

53. Ms. Paola withdrew.

54. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Gutierrez (Project Nehemiah Inc.) took a place at the petitioners' table.

55. Mr. GUTIERREZ (Project Nehemiah Inc.) said that he was addressing the Committee as a priest and the leader of an organization which provided assistance to widows, orphans and refugees.

56. As a follower of the teachings of Jesus Christ, he could not hide his head in the sand like an ostrich in order not to notice what was going on around him. Many people had paid with their lives in the past, in defence of the truth, for the freedom which people currently enjoyed. Having twice visited Western Sahara, a country which had ceased to exist and which was still called Spanish Sahara on old maps and globes, he had seen for himself the sufferings of women, children and old people. When Almighty God created the desert, He had not thought it would be turned into a prison camp. Two fraternal peoples, at war with one another, were currently lifting up their prayers to one God, Allah, asking him to help crush their enemies. That was not pleasing to God. It was necessary to put a stop to the fratricidal war and urge the warring sides to come to the negotiating table. Evil triumphed when righteous people stood idly by.

57. Mr. Gutierrez withdrew.

58. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Hendrickson took a place at the petitioners' table.

59. Mr. HENDRICKSON, a retired captain of the United States Coast Guard, addressing the Committee as a private citizen, said that pursuant to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice dated 16 October 1975, the Court had concluded that the materials and information presented to it did not establish any tie of territorial sovereignty between the Territory of Western Sahara and the Kingdom of Morocco or the Mauritanian entity. Thus the Court had not found legal ties of such a nature as might affect the application of General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) in the decolonization of Western Sahara and, in particular, of the principle of self-determination through the free and fair expression of the will of the peoples of the Territory.

60. At the same time, in August 1988, Morocco and the Frente POLISARIO on the one hand and the Security Council on the other had agreed to the peace proposals put forward jointly by the United Nations and OAU, the basic points of which were, first, a free and fair referendum on the self-determination of the Saharan

people, during which the Saharan people would choose between independence and integration with Morocco, and second, an understanding that the list of voters for the referendum would be compiled on the basis of the Spanish census of 1974.

61. A free referendum that could satisfy the international community had to be transparent. The Territory should be open to the international press, independent observers and human rights organizations. That was particularly important in view of the fact that the Spanish census, like any other census, had its margin of error, but that margin should none the less be reasonable and not unduly influenced by an outside entity making decisions on behalf of the indigenous people of the Territory. Moreover, the political atmosphere was critical for any free referendum. It was the responsibility of the United Nations to create an atmosphere free of intimidation where the two parties could approach the referendum in a spirit of cooperation.

62. Regarding the human rights situation in Western Sahara, the most troubling element was the publicly televised statement by His Majesty King Hassan II last July in which he announced the release of Moroccan political prisoners except those opposed to the annexation of Western Sahara. Why were there Saharan refugee camps in Algeria? They had become refugees because the victory in their struggle to free their country from Spanish colonialism had been stolen by a more powerful neighbour. The Saharans had not lost heart and had done the best they could under extreme conditions. Thanks to the Frente POLISARIO and the leadership of the camps, the schooling of children and adults had been made mandatory, sanitary and health conditions in the camps had been vastly improved, two boarding schools had been established, day care centres had enabled mothers to work and participate in governing the camps, 35 per cent of the leadership of the camps were women, health and dental clinics had been staffed with trained Saharan personnel and limited agricultural enterprises had been established.

63. A free and fair referendum in Western Sahara was not only in the interests of the United Nations but also in the national interests of the United States, because, first, it was a basic belief of every American that all people had the right to self-determination and the right to determine their own future and the future of their children within their homeland; and second, a free and fair referendum in Western Sahara would promote regional stabilization. Further regional destabilization could prove disastrous.

64. Mr. Hendrickson withdrew.

65. Mr. SNOUSSI (Morocco), in response to the statement by Ms. May, said that she had not kept up to date with developments in the Territory or the United Nations. The fact that she referred to a census of the population showed that she had not familiarized herself with Security Council resolutions 725 (1991) of 31 December 1991 and 907 (1994) of 29 March 1994. She should refer to United Nations archives documents in order to be able to speak more competently on the subject. He pointed out that Morocco had been the first State to put forward the idea of a referendum that would allow people freely to express their opinion on their future.

66. With regard to the statement by Ms. Paola, he noted that she had less significantly misinterpreted Morocco's intentions and actions, and he did not wish to get into an argument with her on an issue which had been under discussion by competent persons for some time. Regarding Mr. Hendrickson's statement, he indicated that Mr. Hendrickson had alluded to a statement by the King of Morocco and had evidently misunderstood or misinterpreted it. What the King of Morocco had been discussing related neither to the Saharans nor the Sahara.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.